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SUBJECT: ITALY ON SOMALIA: ARAB LEAGUE, CIVIL SOCIETY KEY

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Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Jonathan R. Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Poloff met with MFA Somalia Coordinator Giancarlo Izzo November 3 and with Angelo Masetti, Spokesman for the Italy-Somalia Forum, October 26 to discuss the situation in Somalia. Izzo and Masetti agreed that the TFIs were weak, and that the CIC's goals were unclear. They both believed that increased involvement of the international community with representatives of Somali civil society was critical to understanding and improving the situation on the ground. Izzo and Masetti each suggested organizing a meeting, sponsored by an independent organization, that would bring civil society leaders together. Izzo noted that a meeting or communique of the International Contact Group could be timely. End summary.

GOI:
TFIs weak; CIC an unknown; Arab League, Civil Society Key

12. (C) Following the postponement of the Khartoum talks, Izzo suggested that an International Contact Group meeting or communique could be timely. Although it would be hard for the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFI) and Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) to walk back from the statements they had made, dialogue should be the contact group message. Izzo observed that putting together the Arab League and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had not worked because they did not have well-defined roles in the process. Having initially favored Arab League involvement in the hope that it could bring forth moderate elements in the CIC, Italy now worried that the Arab League was willing to support any Muslim element in Somalia, regardless of its level of extremism. If Islamists took over in Somalia, Izzo argued, it would set a bad precedent for other African countries with a Muslim population. The Arab League should look at the situation in Somalia as a long-term challenge of building a modern Islamic state, not through a short-term perspective in which any Muslim actor was worth supporting. Italy believed Egypt in particular needed to hear this message.

13. (C) On the TFIs, Izzo said they seemed to be the party that was most reluctant to dialogue at this point. While Speaker of Parliament Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan felt he had been marginalized, Izzo said the ineffectual Prime Minister Gedi had been given "another six months" by the Ethiopian

Foreign Minister, who had met with Gedi, Hassan Adan and President Yusuf. Izzo observed the TFI leaders were using the support of the international community to ensure their own positions, rather than doing something for the Somali people. Looking to Ethiopia to intervene and the international community to save them, Izzo argued the TFI leaders were increasingly seen by the Somali people as representatives of outside interests.

14. (C) The CIC was a problem, Izzo said, because its composition and goals were an unknown. If there was conflict between the CIC and Ethiopia, he thought Ethiopia could encounter difficulties. Fighting the CIC's more motivated recruits, along with Addis's other domestic and international problems, could cause serious problems for Ethiopia, according to Izzo. Moreover, Izzo thought Egypt and Saudi Arabia might decide to provide support to the CIC. Ethiopia's actions, however, would be guided by its fear of any type of Muslim government in Somalia, according to Izzo. Izzo noted that it would be difficult to say how Italy would respond to Ethiopian involvement in a conflict in Somalia would be, and that if Ethiopian forces were to protect Baidoa from the CIC, the TFIs would lose all legitimacy with Somalis.

15. (C) Izzo said that while the UK had joined with Italy in calling for a partial exception to the arms embargo in August, the U.S. had not supported the move. He suggested that the measure could have shown international support for the TFIs and reassured Ethiopia. Izzo suggested that IGASOM could be called on at this point to protect Baidoa and provide training to strengthen TFI capabilities. He noted that Kenya was now supportive of IGASOM involvement. The international community had not been well served by UNSYG Special Representative Fall, Izzo said. Fall's approach had not been decisive enough, and had needed the Contact Group and the European Task Force for support.

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16. (C) The international community needed to have more contact with Somali civil society, and especially women, according to Izzo. Noting that the conference in Nairobi had not included civil society representatives, he argued that holding an event with civil society leaders and NGOs, with an emphasis on the participation of women, could have a dramatic impact. Izzo suggested that a non-governmental entity could sponsor the event as an impartial actor. Traditional Somali culture could be our greatest ally, Izzo observed. However, the youth, as evidenced by the extremism of the Shebab, had grown up under different circumstances and could radically change the face of Somali culture.

Diaspora Representative:
Need more contact with Somalis

17. (C) Masetti, in a separate meeting with Poloff, also emphasized the importance of increasing contact with civil society. The international community needed to work on creating a space for participation by Somali civil society, in Masetti's view. He noted that, while civil society had been sidelined, robust contact by the international community with individuals in key social positions could not only help create political movement, it could also help increase outsiders' understanding of internal dynamics within Somalia. The Italy-Somalia Forum, an independent organization of Italians and Somalis, founded in 2000 to promote peace and reconstruction in Somalia, has been working to identify key players within civil society, according to Masetti. He offered the Italy-Somalia Forum as a facilitator/partner in organizing a conference that would bring together Somali civil society and the international community.

18. (C) Explaining that he had extensive contact with Somalis in Somalia of various clans through his work on behalf of the

Italy-Somalia Forum, Masetti commented on the internal dynamics there. According to Masetti, while initial support for the CIC had come from the people because the courts were seen as an alternative to the warlords and their checkpoints, Somalis were beginning to chafe at the new limitations on their freedom imposed by the CIC. The courts movement was losing popular support and the business community was distancing itself. While the CIC had external support in the form of arms and imported radicals, Masetti said the group was not prepared for the possibility of a popular revolt and that Somalis increasingly saw the CIC as distant from traditional Somali culture. While the youth was more supportive of the CIC, older Somalis were protesting controls it had imposed, especially the bans on radio and television.

19. (C) Though Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys was the commander of the CIC, he did not have absolute control of the courts with their assortment political views, Muslim beliefs, and clans, Masetti said. The main glue holding the CIC together was the courts' joint opposition to the TFIs and Ethiopia, not a common vision. Without an opposing force, Masetti argued, it would be hard for the CIC to maintain unity. While Aweys was not a person the USG could dialogue with directly, Masetti suggested that it was nevertheless important to keep contact with him through intermediaries since he was an adept politician and not a mindless radical.

10. (C) The TFIs were on the verge of collapse, according to Masetti, and parts of the government possibly were planning to stage a legal coup by convening parliament in Mogadishu and electing a new prime minister and president. Among the TFI leaders, Yusuf and Gedi were irrelevant, Masetti said, with Speaker Hassan Adan the only figure who had continued to prove his worth and wanted to keep a dialogue open with the CIC. Hassan Adan had the trust of the Arab countries and the CIC, but was hampered by the fact that he was from a weak tribe. Authorizing an international peacekeeping force (who would have no peace to keep) to support the TFIs could send the whole region into crisis, Masetti argued, while working to boost internal security by providing training, on a clan basis, for those members of the former police forces who had shown respect for human rights could make a positive difference.
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